Dealing with School Violence in South Africa[1]

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Introduction

Violence in schools across South Africa has become commonplace and is likely to impact negatively on children in a number of ways. Experience and exposure to violence in any environment at a young age increases the risk of later victimisation, as well as of engaging in anti-social behaviour later in life.

Schools, if considered holistically, are environments where children not only acquire knowledge but also where they learn to know, to be, to do and to live together.[2]

Violence in schools impacts negatively on all these processes, creating instead a place where children learn fear and distrust, where they develop distorted perceptions of identity, self and worth, and where they acquire negative social capital.[3]

A range of theoretical approaches have been applied internationally to school violence. Many of these offer convincing explanations of why children resort to violence within the school context. Yet none of these approaches individually, particularly in a South African context, provide an adequate explanation. Rather, certain arguments from some of these key approaches together provide a greater understanding of the school violence phenomenon.

Hirschi's theory of Social Control provides the broad framework for this paper. Hirschi argues that:

- schools and school experiences serve as, and create, social bonds,
- these bonds can restrain children and adolescents from engaging in violence, but at the same time,
- these bonds can actually increase pressure on children to engage in anti-social behaviour.[4]

Also of use is Agnew's analysis of General Strain theory. Agnew posits that strains on children within the school environment are particularly likely to result in crime when they:

- are seen as unjust;
- are seen as high in magnitude;
- are associated with low self-control; and
- create some pressure or incentive to engage in violent behaviour.[5]

Finally, Sameroff's Transactional Ecological Development model asserts that children and learners cannot be studied outside of the contexts in which they develop and are located. This equates to understanding the development of young people on three levels, namely:

- the micro level (or genotype – an individual's biology and unique characteristics);
- mid-level (phenotype – the dynamic channel or representation of the self at any point in time, based on current transactions in the geno- or envirotype); and
- the macro level (the envirotype –

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external factors such as family influences, peer relationships and the school and community environment).

This model emphasises the fact that rather than identifying individuals as solely or inherently responsible for their developmental outcomes, it is the confluence of risk and protective factors, influenced by an external environment, that dictate the outcome of an adaptation to any individual's environment.[6]

Within this framework, the paper outlines three fundamental characteristics of school violence in South Africa. Each characteristic needs to be addressed as a discrete yet symbiotic factor in a larger contextual framework:

- Violence in South African schools is embedded in the broader violent South African environment.
- Violence is a phenomenon that has both structural and cultural dimensions.
- Schools as social institutions reflect violence and contribute to its occurrence.[7]

In discussing the various findings of the study, concrete recommendations are made on how to deal with violence in schools in a coherent and integrated manner, addressing each of the above three factors. Central to all of these – and the key assumption on which all are premised – is sustainability: the sustainability of any intervention needs to be integrated into its design. The exact means by which sustainability is to be achieved depends on the nature of the chosen actions, interventions or programmes. The means does, however, need to be built into, and made explicit in, the design of the measure taken.

An overview of school violence

The recently completed National Schools Violence Study (NSVS) undertaken by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) has established the exact extent of violence within South African schools. In total, 15.3% of learners in primary and secondary schools have been victims of some form of violence while at school, or immediately outside the school gates. Assault, sexual assault, rape or sexual harassment and robberies are all forms of violence that have been identified by learners of all ages, both boys and girls, as occurring within their schools. This is in addition to more difficult to quantify forms of violence such as bullying or teasing, which are commonly associated with school environments.

Girl learners at primary schools are more likely than boys to be robbed, while boys at primary schools are more likely than girls to be victims of sexual violence. Boys and girls are equally likely to be victims of robbery or assault. At secondary schools, boys are substantially more likely than girls to be threatened, robbed or assaulted, while girls are more likely than boys to be sexually assaulted or raped. At primary schools, more than one in ten (12%) learners reported that they had been shouted at or made to feel ashamed in front of others.

While constituting the bulk of violence, it is not just learners who are the victims. Reports provided by principals and educators show that up to three in five secondary schools have received reports of learner-on-educator verbal abuse, one in four secondary schools have received reports of learner-on-educator physical violence, and 2.4% of schools have received reports of learners sexually assaulting educators.

Conversely, educators are involved in perpetrating acts of violence against children, not only in the form of corporal punishment but also through actual assaults and sexual or 'love' relationships with learners, both at primary and secondary school level. Research shows that in South Africa two out of five school principals report at least one incident of educators verbally abusing children, and one in four principals receive reports of educators physically abusing learners at school.[8]

This data lends empirical substance to the perception that South African schools are experiencing high levels of violence; and high levels of violence are likely to put undue strain and pressure on children, particularly those initially not exhibiting inclinations

towards violence but who might be exposed to other risk factors such as violence at home, poor parenting or low academic performance. This strain might in turn put pressure on such children to respond to, and engage in, violent behaviour at school.

Schools provide a useful starting point for concrete interventions since they constitute the immediate location of the violence, are one of the most influential factors in the environment in which children live, and provide potential protective or risk factors for children.

A 'whole school' approach to dealing with violence

The experiences of learners, educators and principals highlight the need for a developmental approach to school safety. Rather than focusing on individual aspects of the school or environment, what is suggested is a 'whole school' approach to dealing with violence at schools.

The school as an entity consists of several interdependent 'components', namely, learners, educators, principals, school management teams, school governing bodies (SGBs), and parents or caregivers. Together, these components interact and exist within the greater system of the home and community.

Only by dealing with all aspects of the system will violence ultimately be reduced and eradicated. This calls for a carefully targeted, coherent system of programmes and interventions that complement rather than duplicate each other.

Situational prevention

Situational prevention within schools addresses more the immediate manifestation and facilitating factors of violence than the fundamental causes. Despite this, it remains an important step in the process of making schools safe environments. Situational prevention is also usually premised on the observations and assumptions that adults, usually school authorities, make about the environment. In this process the voices of the learners are often ignored.

As a starting point towards making schools safe and letting learners lead the process, schools can implement school mapping exercises. School mapping is a low-resource, relatively quick exercise whereby groups of learners can together literally map out their school, drawing the school environs and marking places within the school grounds where they feel particularly vulnerable or unsafe. Conversely, they could also map areas where they do feel safe. Exercises such as this provide an indication to principals and SGBs where the places are within schools that pose the most threat to learners. Threat locations often differ fundamentally from areas perceived by adults as unsafe.

Once a registry of areas identified as unsafe by learners and adults has been compiled, schools can formulate plans of action to deal with these spots. Steps may be as simple as replacing broken light bulbs, installing lighting in dark areas or cutting long grass. These measures all reflect 'environmentally friendly' school environments. This does not refer so much to security infrastructure as it does to safe, well-kept and clean school environments.

Strong attachment to schools and learning on the part of children has been shown to serve as a protective factor for young people; but just as these bonds are threatened by violence and fear of and within the school, so unpleasant school environments can threaten these bonds. At a more fundamental level, unkempt areas offer both real and perceived dangers, with perpetrators of violence using the cover of long grass and bushes, overgrown trees and dark areas as hiding places from which violence can be inflicted. This is exhibited in the fact that together with toilets, open areas and overgrown sports fields are among the most common areas identified as holding fear for learners.

While more difficult in existing schools, another measure targeting environmental school safety is to locate boys and girls toilets in different areas in the design of new schools. Despite the fact that toilets hold much fear for learners, in most schools boys' and girls' toilets are located next to each other. As such, girls entering and

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leaving the toilets are frequently harassed by boys standing around outside. The maintenance of lighting in classrooms and toilets is also essential.

The alarmingly high percentage of learners who report access to weapons at school suggests the need for more immediate intervention on the part of the Department of Education (DoE). While 'target hardening' – that is, increasing security around a school, such as security fencing, security gates, alarm systems, security guarding and metal detectors – does not at any level address the causes of violence at schools, it does make it harder for learners to bring weapons to school, and by so doing addresses the intensity of the violence that occurs within the school environment.

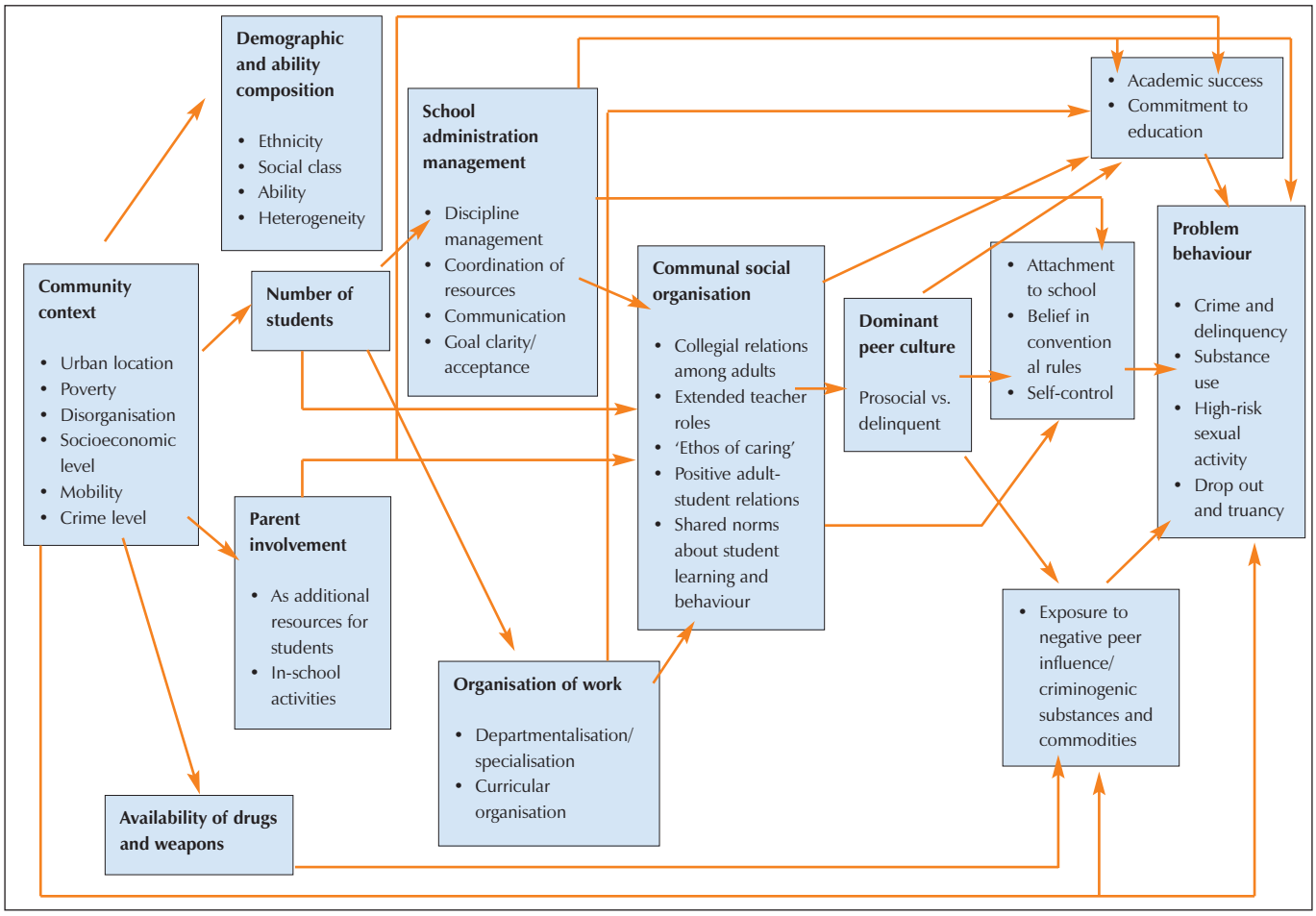
The provision of sound infrastructure should also go some way towards preventing learners from other schools and gang members from surrounding communities from entering schools – something which is commonly reported by learners, educators and authorities. However, there are a number of examples where security infrastructure has been provided, and the school has failed to maintain or adequately utilise the measures available. Security fencing that has holes in it or security gates that are left open are as good as useless, as are security lights that do not work.

The integrity of perimeter fencing needs to be monitored daily, and school authorities must assume responsibility for monitoring and maintaining this infrastructure. Without this, steps taken by the DoE to provide or improve infrastructure are simply unsustainable.

As part of this process, the SGB chairperson assumes a monitoring role in the school management team (SMT), and should be held accountable for ensuring that the school has a plan to identify existing and potential hotspots within the school environs where learners might be particularly vulnerable. The SGBs, together

Source: Gottfredson DG, School and Delinquency, *Cambridge University Press, New York, 2001.*

Figure 1: Community and school factors influencing student problem behaviour



with (to varying degrees) the SMTs, already have certain levels of accountability ascribed to them through the 1996 Schools Act.[9] Various levels of accountability exist: upward (to district, provincial and national authorities), downward (to educators and learners), and outward (to parents and communities).[10]

One of the most effective forms of monitoring is for parents and communities – through structures such as SGBs, parent teacher associations (PTAs) and SMTs – to hold schools accountable to minimum standards applied to a range of school outcomes, including the safety of learners. Through this, parents and communities also *de facto* assume responsibility for the safety of learners at school, and can be assigned certain responsibilities relating to safety. Parents and communities can monitor and ensure the integrity of security infrastructure such as fencing, through, for example, daily patrols.

The DoE, with support from a range of agencies, has already taken steps to implement such security measures. The focus thus far is on 'high risk' and priority schools – that is, schools that have been identified by the DoE as already experiencing high levels of violence. Additionally, some provincial departments have already established mechanisms to engage parents and community members in facilitating the monitoring of infrastructure and school safety. One such example is the Western Cape through Education, Community Safety and the Safer Schools Initiative. Parents and community member volunteers at certain high-risk schools patrol the school perimeter and identified hotspots at specific times of the school day. This approach is particularly useful where schools might be challenged by internal capacity constraints.[11]

School and classroom management

These measures alone are, however, insufficient to address violence at schools. Schools have a more important role to play in influencing the risk factors associated with violence, both within schools and within the wider community. Schools should provide a very clear framework and code of conduct for learners, detailing what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Codes of conduct, disciplinary procedures and emergency procedures should all be clearly communicated to learners. These measures are simply an extension of the information that most schools already provide to learners on what to do and where to go if they do experience violence. Policies and procedures should be clearly displayed for both learners and staff to see on a daily basis, serving as constant reinforcement. Technically, such codes of conduct are already meant to be in place at all schools.

Children involved in the NSVS identified classrooms, toilets, and open grounds or playing fields as the sites where most violence occurred at their schools. Educators should also monitor these areas whenever learners are likely to be using them. While the ratio of learners to educators is often raised as an impediment to such measures, analysis of the data on educator:learner ratios from the DoE's own EMIS system suggests that there are enough educators in schools to undertake such tasks. Principals and the educators should be held responsible when incidents of violence occur in unmonitored areas, whether these are open areas or school buildings.

All this speaks to effective school management. Effective management systems within the school will enable and enhance effective discipline and control. Minimum standards of safety for all schools need to be implemented by the DoE. This information needs to be widely disseminated to provinces, districts and the schools themselves.

Responsibility for achieving these standards should be written into educators' and principals' performance agreements as key performance indicators. In this way, staff become accountable for what occurs at their schools and under their watch (more on accountability later). This will also ensure that all schools are brought in line with departmental policy.

Steps should also be taken to provide educators with the appropriate skills to address potential and current incidents of violence at schools. Related to school

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management, many educators exhibit a lack of adequate classroom management skills; a situation that is exacerbated by the banning of corporal punishment as a disciplinary option. Previously, discipline was maintained largely through fear of physical punishment – without this option educators feel that learners have no reason to behave responsibly within the classroom.

This creates a dichotomous situation: on the one hand many educators continue to use corporal punishment, placing further strain on learners and indeed legitimising a specific form of violence (violence for 'corrective' purposes); on the other hand learners, through ill discipline and anti-social behaviour, abuse the restrictions on corporal punishment where educators abide by the rules.

Training on classroom management thus needs to be incorporated into school and skill development plans. Related to this, educators need to know what to do in response to a violent incident, as well as how to identify early on the potential for violence, and how to prevent it.

Gender awareness in relation to a code of conduct is also an important component of educator training. 'Love relationships' or any other form of sexual engagement between learners and educators are entirely inappropriate, and under South African law are often illegal. Schools need to send out a clear message on the inappropriateness of such relationships, and the offending educators need to be disciplined in the most serious manner.

In addition, educators need to be made aware not only of the punitive consequences for them of such actions, but also of the more implicit, negative consequences on the learners whom they target in such relationships.

School authorities, through the principal or SGB, also need to be made accountable for dealing appropriately with such behaviour on the part of teachers, in ways that reflect the seriousness of the act. This again relates to the issue of effective and accountable school management. Teachers need to be made aware of the example they set for learners, and how their actions are validated and modelled by the children in their care.

Much of what occurs within schools can be associated with a lack of respect for individuals generally and, more specifically, for their right to education, safety and dignity. Underpinning all interventions, a cross-cutting rights-based culture needs to be inculcated into all aspects of school life: learners, educators and principals must be made aware of their rights and what to do if these are violated.

Concomitantly, along with rights go responsibilities – a fact that has until recently been neglected from much of the advocacy around children's rights. Learners and educators should be made aware of the responsibilities attached to their rights, and that failing to act on these responsibilities has consequences for both them and those around them. Ideally, this component should be built into the life skills curriculum.

Starting early – early childhood development

While data shows that secondary schools reflect higher levels of violence than primary schools, there is sufficient violence reported at primary schools to warrant more than a little concern. Behaviour is established early in childhood; the experiences and learning of children in their formative years set much of their later behaviour. Children of this age have been shown to model the behaviour around them and to which they are exposed. This suggests that in addition to the above interventions, there is a need to target children at an early age, and early childhood development (ECD) programmes offer the opportunity to do just that.

Farrington shows that the greatest impact achieved by child-focused interventions targeting violence, is those starting with children in their earliest years of development.[12] Empathy, self-esteem, self-control, morality, an appropriate sense of right and wrong, and interpersonal skills have all been identified as key factors in building resiliency to crime and violence through the teen years and in later life. And all these traits are, to a large degree,

moulded in early childhood. The groundwork for pro-social behaviour and positive interpersonal relationships with peers and adults can all be incorporated into ECD programmes.

While ECD programmes are in place in South Africa, responsibility for their implementation currently falls across three departments: Education, Health and Social Development (DSD). Children from birth to nine years of age are targeted under the ECD framework. However, the DoE in most provinces is involved with children only in the Reception (or Grade R) year. From this point on, it becomes primarily the responsibility of the DSD to run ECD programmes. Programmes are concerned mainly with providing crèche facilities, after-school care, adequate training of pre-school educators, and access to health, nutrition and immunisations.

Yet integral to the success of ECD programmes are pre-school educators who are trained not only in conventional pedagogy but also in the facilitation of pro-social skills, conflict resolution and anti-violent behaviour. Where schools and educators are involved in after-school programmes for young learners in particular, these activities need to reflect and integrate positive life skills.

Furthermore, ECD programmes provide the opportunity to address issues in the family environment through family-based interventions by the DSD, which target positive parenting skills as well as positive forms of discipline and reinforcement. While not directly the responsibility of the DoE, the school – through parents' relationships with the school – provides a perfect access point to families. This ensures that the positive developmental and cognitive needs of young learners are met both at school and after school.

Rather than returning daily to homes where they are confronted with violence, conflict and contradictory messages, learners should return to homes and families that nourish, protect and reinforce them in a consistent manner. Interventions targeting the homes need to manipulate and challenge to the child's benefit, these often hostile and unhealthy environments. The DoE can thus play a pivotal and proactive role in coordinating and facilitating a more integrated approach to ECD by the three departments involved.

The role of parenting in ECD can and should be taken further. Parents set the example for their children. Research consistently shows the importance of high-quality relationships between parents and children, and other family members, beyond the issue of punishment. However, in South Africa many parents lack not only parenting skills but also skills that indirectly impact on the wellbeing of their children, such as labour and financial skills. ECD programmes need to take cognisance of these gaps, and where possible work in conjunction with programmes offering various forms of training in these skills. One example of this would be the DSD linking up with the Department of Labour to offer a training package to potential and existing parents.

International experience shows that joint interventions by welfare or social development departments, together with education, in targeting for example pregnant (single) mothers and sustaining support through the early years of the child's education, are among the most successful in preventing delinquency and violence in children.[13]

Many of the lessons integral to ECD should not, however, be limited to this phase of education. Social competency and pro-social skills such as, but certainly not limited to, assertiveness training, conflict resolution, anger management skills and self-control need to be integrated into the curriculum and taught in all primary school classrooms.[14] Through the development of pro-social behaviour and positive relationships within the school environment, the school becomes an important mechanism through which positive social bonds and networks (positive social capital) are developed and maintained.

An integrated approach to addressing school violence – beyond Education

The role of departments other than Education has been alluded to throughout

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this paper, particularly in relation to the causes of violence and the experiences of learners outside the school environment that impact on learners while at school. Exposure to and direct experience of violence within the home, as well as outside of the home in the wider community, are common. Learners are also bombarded with violence in the ongoing reporting of violence in the media, on interactive media such as personal computers and electronic games, discussions on violence and the experiences of those around them.

The impact of exposure to violence at a young age is well documented, with a number of longitudinal studies in other countries pointing to television viewing habits as long-term predictors of child aggression, as well as interpersonal violence leading to arrest and conviction later in life.[15]

The alcohol, drugs and weapons that are so easily available to learners within the school environs, or immediately outside the school grounds, come from the homes and communities in which the learners spend the rest of their time. Similarly, the behaviour, attitudes and examples of parents, caregivers and other adults in the home and community all have a profound impact on learners' academic development and performance, as well as on their social attitudes, behaviour and responses at school.

The NSVS highlights the linkages between school experiences and the home and neighbourhood environments in which learners live: 10–15% of learners have family members who have used illegal drugs in the past year; 10–13% have caregivers who have been in jail; while almost one in five learners have siblings who have, or are currently, in jail. Both exposure to violence and personal experience of violence are just as common in the home and community as at school, with one-tenth of primary school learners having been assaulted at home, and one in ten secondary school learners having been robbed at home.

The study shows that all of these are significant factors in learners' experiences of violence at school. More than one-third of those learners in both primary and secondary schools who have been exposed to violence at home have been victims of violence at school, as opposed to less than one-fifth of those learners who had not been exposed to violence in the home. Similarly, one in three (31%) learners who had been victims of violence within the home experienced violence at school, as opposed to14.2% of learners who had not experienced direct violent victimisation at home.

These findings suggest the need for a range of urgent, targeted, well planned and coordinated responses from the DSD, as well as a more limited role for the South African Police Service (SAPS). The role of the DSD is critical in addressing violence in schools, and in the long term the failure of this portfolio to become involved will undermine any meaningful change, both within and outside of schools. It is beyond the scope or mandate of the DoE to offer interventions within the home, or to address violence outside of the school.

The levels of violence within the home also emphasise the importance of a social crime prevention approach. The SAPS argues that the majority of violent crime (assault and sexual assault/rape) is committed within the home, beyond the reach of conventional policing. While the NSVS data does not provide detailed analysis of violence within the home or how it relates to other crimes outside of the home, the data provides sufficient evidence of the relationship between school violence and exposure to, and the experience of, violence within the home.

These forms of violence can only be addressed adequately by directly targeting the social correlates of crime – for example, (but not limited to) high levels of inequality in both economic and gender terms, poverty, unemployment, access to services such as housing, health and welfare, as well as environmental design.

Providing alternatives

Children, particularly younger learners, are exposed to high levels of conflict and 'legitimised' violence within their homes.

The NSVS reveals that almost half (47.3%) of primary school learners are spanked, hit or beaten by their caregivers or parents at home. More than one-quarter (26.7%) reveal that family members often shout and scream at each other when they are angry, while one-tenth (9.9%) report that people in their family sometimes hit each other when they are angry with each other.

Yet parents and caregivers frequently express the need for alternatives to corporal punishment within the home. The DSD can work with service providers from civil society to offer, through schools, family interventions that provide alternatives to corporal punishment as well as positive conflict resolution skills. Similarly, the DoE can work with the DSD and these agencies to offer training to educators on alternatives to corporal punishment within the classroom, as another means of developing classroom management skills.

Corporal punishment has been shown repeatedly in a range of studies to exacerbate the learning and acting out of violent behaviour among children. This is borne out in the findings of the NSVS where learners who report the use of corporal punishment in both the home and school environments are more likely to experience some form of violence at school.

Further, learners who are exposed to conflicting models of discipline at school and at home are more likely to see one or the other as unfair or unjust, resulting in greater strain placed on the individuals and a greater likelihood of them acting out undesirable behaviour. Interventions to develop skills in positive parenting would also lessen the burden on schools in relation to the behaviour of learners within the school environment.

Drugs, alcohol and weapons

Violence in schools, as with crime in general, is exacerbated in both intensity and frequency by the presence and availability of alcohol, weapons and many types of drugs. These are 'accessories' that are commonly associated with adults rather than children: legislation prohibits children and teenagers from purchasing alcohol and weapons, while all drugs are effectively banned. However, just as it is often difficult to enforce legislation concerning alcohol and drugs among adults, so too is it apparently even more difficult to enforce among young people, with evidence of the increasing availability of drugs, alcohol and weapons at schools.

Up to three in ten learners at secondary schools know fellow learners who have brought weapons to schools. The same percent report that it is easy to get a knife at school, while almost one in ten primary school learners say that it is easy for them to get a gun at school. Alcohol and drugs are also readily available: one in ten primary school learners and 14.7% of secondary school learners report that it is easy to get alcohol at school, while one-tenth of both primary and secondary school learners report that drugs are easy to access at school.

These findings indicate that drug and alcohol use is not something that can be associated only with older learners as part of the process of 'growing up' or experimentation. Substance abuse seems to be infiltrating the lives of significantly younger children, as young as eight years of age.

This data suggests, on the one hand, the important role of the DoE in preventing alcohol, drugs and weapons being brought on to school grounds. On the other hand, the DSD has an important mandate to offer, together with schools, programmes for young people who have or who show the potential for alcohol and substance abuse problems. While the relationship between violence and alcohol and substance abuse is complex, both the frequency and intensity of violence is exacerbated by the use of drugs and alcohol.

A number of recent reports highlight the increased usage of alcohol and drugs by younger and younger children, with recent media reports putting increased numbers of addicts at as low an age as eight within certain districts in, for example, the Western Cape.[16]

Substance abuse interventions aimed at both preventing and managing substance

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abuse should be offered by the DSD in conjunction with the schools, rather than initiatives being left to the schools or the DoE alone. Creating awareness around issues of substance abuse is critical, but functional, well resourced and effective rehabilitation centres are also essential in addressing violence within schools.

Related to this, the ready availability of alcohol and drugs in the immediate vicinity of schools – a picture commonly reported by learners, educators and principals alike – further exacerbates the potential for violence and disorder at schools. Learners and staff reported learners sourcing alcohol from shebeens and taverns neighbouring the school, or drugs from 'merchants' immediately outside the school fence and gates.

There is little that the school authorities or the DoE can do on this score other than engage local government and local police, both of whom have repeatedly been reluctant to act. In some instances, a community mapping of shebeens and schools blatantly shows a concentration (whether deliberate or accidental) of shebeens around the locations of schools. Provincial liquor licensing authorities need to assume responsibility for refusing licences in the immediate vicinity of schools, and the SAPS and local government need to assume responsibility for policing a 'substance-free' environment around schools.

There are positive examples of schools engaging local police to do this: action that has resulted in a decrease in reported violence within the respective schools, indicating that partnerships of this nature can be successful. SGBs and other parent and management bodies can also be powerful tools for lobbying and mobilising local role-players and stakeholders in this respect.

At the most fundamental level, the levels of violence also reflect the very basic socio-economic conditions in which a significant proportion of South African children live. The study emphasised the high levels of overcrowding that many learners experience in their homes, as well as their frequently unmet basic needs for food, clothing and shelter. Extensive research shows that a healthy child is more likely to thrive than a child who is hungry and tired. Healthy children are more resilient to violence, and are more resilient to the many and interrelated factors that might drive them to violence. Research shows, for example, that children from overcrowded homes are more likely to exhibit levels of frustration and anger than those from homes that are not overcrowded.

Dealing with these issues is not the responsibility of the DoE but rather that of the departments of Social Development, Housing and Health. While the school provides an important point of intervention to address some of these issues (for example, nutrition through school feeding schemes, or health through school-based inoculation programmes), the primary responsibility falls on other departments within the social cluster.

Giving learners a voice

In the discussion thus far, very little attention has been paid to the voices of children themselves. The NSVS has shown that while information on how to protect oneself and where to report violence is generally available, many learners who fall victim to violence still do not report it.

Whether the reasons for this failure to report are attributable to fear, a lack of trust in the authorities, or a lack of belief that anything can or will be done, this lack of reporting undermines the monitoring of incidents and trends, as well as measures to deal effectively with violence in schools.

Young people need to be encouraged to establish forums within schools where they learn to give voice to, and take responsibility for, the issues that affect them. The DoE should formulate and institutionalise programmes whereby learners are empowered to speak not only for themselves but for others around them, including fellow learners who are for any reason silenced. The hotspot mapping exercise discussed earlier in the paper is another mechanism for children to express their concerns and fears.

There is a strong correlation between inactivity and victimisation and the perpetration of violence. Planned, coordinated and, most importantly, consistent, extramural activities are needed at all schools to involve learners in positive activities and reduce their exposure to gangs, violence or criminal opportunities. Such activities could focus on sports, drama or other cultural events and activities.

It is important that the voices of the children be heard in designing appropriate activities if they are to be used by the learners. It is also essential that these activities are available throughout the school year and over the course of a learner's schooling, rather than targeted at one set of school holidays or grades.

Related to this is the opportunity for schools to offer learners skills that foster entrepreneurship. This could be offered through various curriculum alternatives or through partnerships with service providers. This is just one example of parallel extramural activities that feed into a longer term goal of social and economic development, empowering learners with a basic set of skills that can be further developed once they leave school.

Research, monitoring and evaluation

One of the most common and biggest impediments to designing and implementing school violence interventions, and monitoring the success of such interventions, is the lack of reliable data. Where data does exist it is often a result of studies addressing school violence as a social problem, rather than a discrete and coherent topic of scientific enquiry; and this results in unreliable and unrepresentative data.[17]

While this is a global phenomenon, it is if anything more pronounced in South Africa where there has been almost no attempt to collect national data on children's and youth safety, particularly within the school environment. Without such data, the scale of the problem cannot be identified, trends cannot be mapped, and any decreases or increases in school violence remain unproven. Furthermore, without such data, effective programming cannot be effected.

Particularly given the dearth of accurate and representative data on the levels and nature of violence in schools, key indicators of school safety need to be developed and monitored on an annual basis. These should include, at a minimum:

- the rate of violent incidents experienced by learners (In order to counter the under-reporting rate to school authorities of incidents, this should be done on the basis of learner interviews at best, or self-reporting at worst, but NOT based on school statistics.);
- the rate of violent incidents and rate of reporting measured by schools through official reporting mechanisms, thus allowing for a comparison between anonymous learners reporting through surveys and official statistics;
- access to and use of drugs within schools;
- access to and use of weapons within schools;
- feelings of safety at school;
- feelings of safety travelling to and from school;
- use of corporal punishment;
- pregnancies (often related to sexual and emotional violence); and
- the likelihood of violence within school as opposed to outside of school (away from school rather than immediately outside school gates).

This data should be integrated into an annual indicator tool, reporting the data in an objective manner. Ideally this should be published in an annual report in order to allow for trends over time to be monitored.

Related to this is a need for the ongoing, systematic, institutionalised recording and reporting of data at school, district and provincial level, with all data fed back to the national DoE. A relatively simple electronic recording system can be developed that will allow for the easy collection of data on each

One of the most common and biggest impediments to designing and implementing school violence interventions, and monitoring the success of such interventions, is the lack of reliable data.

A surveillance system would allow for the immediate needs of learners, and children generally, to be addressed by schools, the DoE and other departments, and will ensure that longer-term measures are put in place that will address the levels of violence more generally in South African society.

incident, including where it occurred, who was involved and the seriousness of the incident. This data will allow school authorities and the DoE to monitor the progress of interventions, and will ensure analysis of accurate and up-to-date data.

Child safety surveillance system

All of this data should ideally be integrated into a larger Child Safety Surveillance System or Monitor – essentially a national monitor of child safety. While a number of policy and advocacy monitoring tools already exist to monitor the well-being of children, there is no tool to assess continually the safety of children or the levels of crime and violence perpetrated against children and young people, despite the fact that both national and international data indicates that they are the most vulnerable population.[18]

Violence, and safety, at schools should form one key component of this monitor, together with general child and youth victimisation data that would reflect violence against children at a general household and community level. Data sweeps need to be conducted annually (or at minimum bi-annually) to allow trends to be monitored. Such a monitoring tool should include both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection, as well as meta-analysis of complementary data and annual policy review updates. The NSVS goes some way towards this.

Through a combination of these approaches, rigorous, targeted and objective scientific data can be combined with the voice of learners and young people themselves, ensuring that a coherent, accurate and representative picture is painted and that progress is monitored on an annual basis.

Related to this is the importance of data at district and school level. While national data is essential for providing a framework for interventions and prioritising interventions and resources, more local level data is required by individual schools to evaluate constantly their needs and priorities. The process of data collecting and analysis at a school level allows each school to identify specific needs, limitations, strengths and resources, ensuring that informed decisions are made regarding specific interventions, or even components of interventions, that need to be implemented.[19] Through this local data, interventions can be tailored and 'fit' to the local and individualised needs of schools, thereby ensuring greater impact and efficacy.[20]

Such a surveillance system would allow for the immediate needs of learners, and children generally, to be addressed by schools, the DoE and other departments, and will ensure that longer-term measures are put in place that will address the levels of violence more generally in South African society.[21] Conversely, without a comprehensive data system such as the one proposed, the effectiveness of ad hoc interventions based on limited data will continue to achieve limited success in addressing violence among children.

Towards an integrated, evidence-based approach to interventions

Finally, it is also suggested that the activities of the DoE are streamlined with the activities and interventions within schools. A range of different programmes exist offered by both the DoE and various non-governmental organisations, many with differing areas of focus and offering alternative strategies. Each of these is based on certain theoretical approaches that are at times conflicting and counter-productive, and some of which have already been shown to be totally ineffective in dealing successfully with violence. While some programmes co-exist and indeed complement others in their approach, others duplicate existing projects.

Many role-players and those engaged in interventions do so without any awareness of others offering similar interventions. Many also duplicate strategies and resources, and show limited indication of success.

Where success is measured, it is too often done in a way that is subjective, unscientific and unreliable in its results. At the most fundamental level, this can be reflected in the lack of baseline data relating to the

subject, as well as the lack of independently verifiable objectives and indicators for the activities. While a handful of programmes are subject to rigorous scientific evaluation and monitoring processes, others continue on the basis of very limited and objective participant or subject review. There is a growing international body of literature on high-quality scientific evidence of best practice and what works, that updates old and disproved approaches to violence prevention among children. This can be used to inform local priorities.

A scan of all interventions targeting learner safety in school should be undertaken through which a concise, coherent and holistic picture of all interventions is established. Through the consolidation and refining of interventions, the DoE will be able to consolidate the resources and expertise available to it and maximise the impact of a few targeted interventions at local, provincial and national levels, thus leading to the ultimate objective – namely, schools that are violence-free, healthy and safe environs for learners and educators.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the NSVS, this paper has attempted to provide a number of suggestions and recommendations that should go some way in addressing the levels of violence within South African schools. That the level of violence is a problem is beyond dispute.

Using aspects of Hirschi's theory of Social Control, Agnew's General Strain theory and Sameroff's Ecological Transactional model as a point of departure, an argument for a coherent, intersectoral and targeted approach to addressing both the causes and manifestations of violence at schools has been made. The symbiotic relationship between the services offered by, and mandate of, the departments of Education and Social Development has been emphasised.

Such an integrated approach includes situational prevention based on both learners' and adults' perceptions and experiences of unsafe areas within and surrounding schools, maintaining pleasant and safe physical school environments, dealing with the availability of and access to drugs, alcohol and weapons in and around schools, offering a range of interventions to both learners and parents, and providing educators and principals with improved classroom skills and whole school management. The paper also argues for a whole school approach, whereby parents and communities surrounding schools are viewed as part of the solution. Violence within the school will not be effectively addressed without dealing with the various environments and contexts in which children live and develop.

Intensified and expanded ECD programmes that are implemented through the DoE and DSD are called for, integral to which is support and targeted interventions for parents and caregivers, as well as training in pro-social, conflict-resolution and positive behaviour skills for educators. The importance of reliable, scientific and longitudinal data, together with the development of key safety indicators, is stressed. An argument is made for the development of a child or learner safety surveillance system, which would facilitate the reliable identification of national trends, as well as trends and priorities at local level. The importance of evidence-based approaches suitable for the local environment is also stressed.

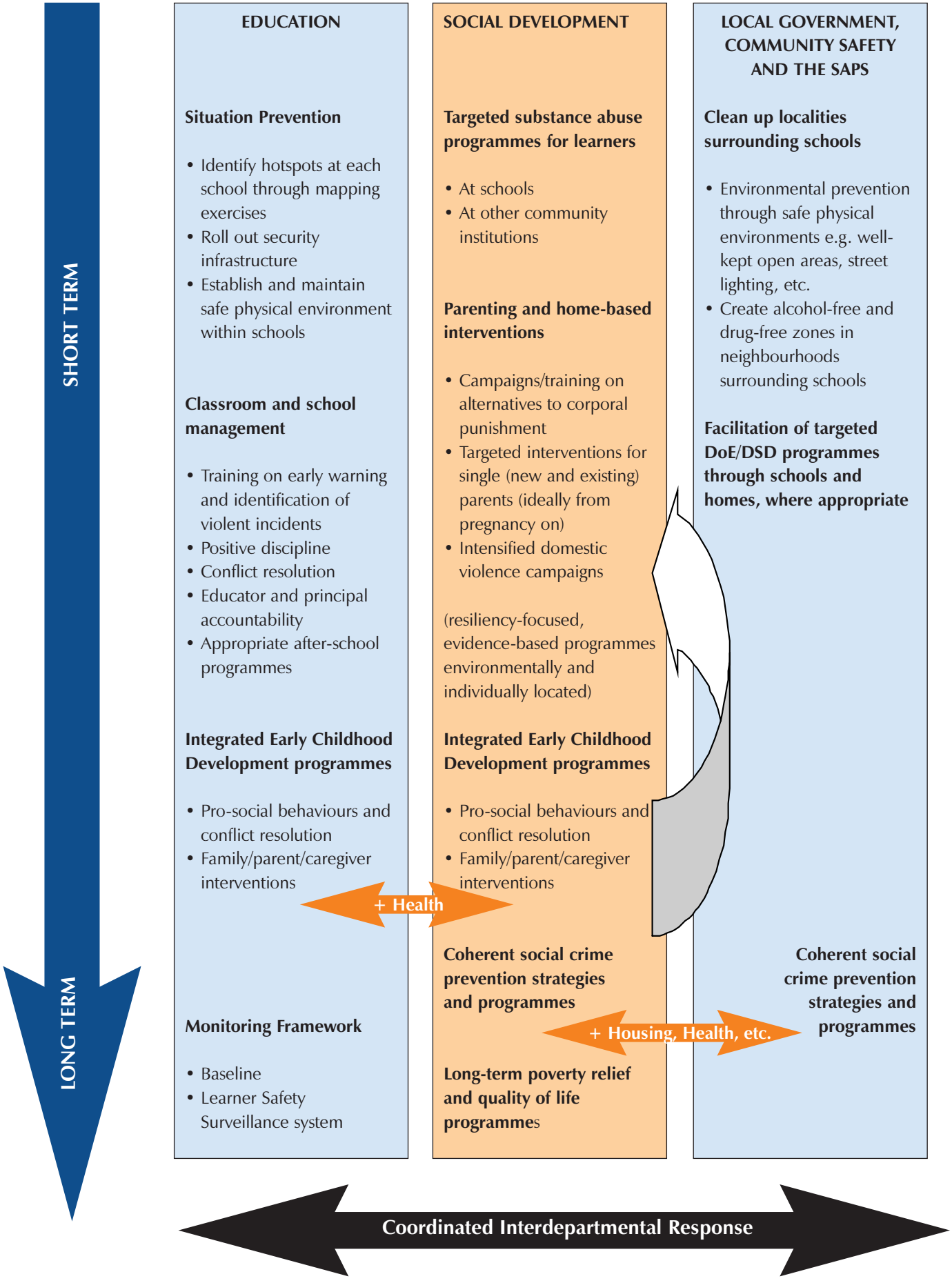
In their totality, school, the education system and the broader environment in general has to offer alternatives to a life of crime and violence. Violence is glamourised in society. The bonds, rewards, perceived privileges and instant gratification that is often associated with criminal elements, gangs and violence often present an option much more preferable to children than the mundane, enforced and perceived ineffective teaching in schools, which are in any case unsafe.

The paper also highlights the importance of longer-term poverty alleviation and household livelihood strategies, which together with social crime prevention programmes start to address the most fundamental causes of growing levels of violence among children in general, and in schools in particular.

The paper also argues for a whole school approach, whereby parents and communities surrounding schools are viewed as part of the solution.

Violence within the school will not be effectively addressed without dealing with the various environments and contexts in which children live and develop.

Figure 2: An overview of recommendations, by department and timeframe



Endnotes

1 The author would like to thank Faeza Khan for valuable comments and insight on initial drafts of this paper.
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9 South African Government, South African Schools Act 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996), Government Printer, Pretoria.
10 World Bank, *Governance, Management and Accountability in Secondary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*, World Bank Working Paper No. 127, African Human Development Series, January 2008.
11 An important rider to this is that volunteers should be carefully screened to ensure that they do not pose a risk to children. This mechanism can be abused by individuals with criminal records for acts relating to crimes against children, and careful, thorough screening will ensure that volunteers serve only to protect learners.
12 Farrington DP, Childhood risk factors and risk-focused prevention, in Maguire M, Morgan R & Reiner R, *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, Oxford University Press, London, 2007.
13 Scientific evaluations of these programmes have shown a positive impact on most participants. Alternative approaches such as the Scared Straight approach used in the United Kingdom, whereby children are shown around prisons, have been shown to have no effect at best, and at worst to actually encourage anti-social behaviour and violence in children, through the glorification of criminals and the perceived positive bonds that exist between offenders (negative social capital best exemplified through, for example, gang membership). See Petrosino P, Petrosino C-T, Buehler J, Scared Straight and other juvenile awareness programmes, in Welsh BC & Farrington DP, *Preventing Crime: What Works for Children, Offenders, Victims and Places*, Springer Verlag, New York, 2007, pp 87-101.
14 It should also be noted that while school violence is seen, as with crime generally, to require an immediate 'fix', steps such as ECD are long-term interventions; the impact in relation to crime is likely only to be seen over a period of five to ten years. However, effective, widespread ECD programmes are also likely to impact positively on the most pressing issues for many South Africans over the longer term, that of crime and violence.
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20 The corollary to this is that programmes and interventions should be designed in a way that allows for tailoring to specific needs and priorities at a school level, or to 'fit' with other, existing interventions.
21 See Burton P & Leoschut L, *Hanging On By Their Fingertips: Youth Resilience to Crime and Violence in South Africa*, CJCP Monograph 5 (forthcoming) for a discussion of the importance of fostering resilience to violence among children, and the most significant factors in the process within the South African environment. Farrington and Welsh also provide perhaps the most comprehensive international perspective on building resilience to crime based on a multitude of long-term panel studies in Farrington & Welsh, Preventing crime, op cit, ; and Farrington DP and Welsh BC, *Saving Children from a Life of Crime: Early Risk Factors and Effective Interventions*, Oxford University Press, London, 2007.

About the author

Patrick Burton is the Director of Research at the CJCP. He has worked on a range of projects focusing on youth and child victimisation, as well as youth resilience to crime.

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The Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) is dedicated to developing, informing and promoting innovative evidence-based crime prevention focused on the groups identified as being vulnerable to victimisation or offending. The CJCP does this by:

- conducting rigorous research into issues of relevance to policy makers, public service officials, development partners and crime prevention practitioners;
- facilitating the implementation of crime prevention projects;
- providing sector-specific and accredited training in crime prevention for policy makers, public sector officials and non-governmental organisation practitioners; and
- disseminating the results of its research and lessons learned to relevant audiences.

About this paper

Violence in South African schools has become a matter of much concern for both government and the South African public. Building on the findings of the CJCP National Schools Violence Study, this paper locates the violence at schools within a broader context, looking at the role of the Department of Education as well as other key role-players.

The paper advocates for a 'whole school' approach to school safety, while addressing external factors through an integrated and coherent strategy involving the Education, Social Development, Local Government and Community Safety departments.

While a number of interventions can address the short-term manifestation of violence in schools, a more fundamental longer-term paradigm shift needs to occur within society in general to deal adequately with the issue, and a number of possible steps towards this shift are recommended.

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